

## ***Status of Teaching Physical Education Course in the First Three Grades of Elementary Schools of Iran***

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### **Abstract**

Physical education (PE) plays a critical role in educating the whole student. Research supports the importance of movement in educating both mind and body. PE contributes directly to development of physical competence and fitness. The benefits of PE can affect both academic learning and physical activity patterns of students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the status of teaching and conduct of PE course in the first three grades of elementary schools of Iran. The samples of this research included 796 men, 325 women PE teachers', plus 691 men, and 500 women principals (Superintendent). They were randomly selected from the schools of fifteen different provinces within the five various regions according to their geographical locations. All participants completed researcher designed questionnaires containing questions rating a wide range of contexts for the purpose of evaluating physical education course in elementary schools including the curriculum, the academic degree of teachers, sport equipment and places, finance, community, and school policies and ethos. The result showed that the majority of teachers and principals had diploma or two years college degree; about 70% of teachers were not specialist in physical education. The majority of teachers (25% men and 20% women) had teaching-experience between 1 to 3 years whereas the principals had between 5 to 10 years of experience, respectively. The majority of teacher (<50%) were familiar with the behavioral objectives and used them in their lesson plans. Approximately, 40% of the teachers emphasized on fundamental movements and play in their classes. About 58% of them used lesson plan for their teaching. Overall, fewer than 50 of the teacher assigned grade based on fulfillment of behavioral objectives. About 78% of teachers used schoolyards for teaching physical education course. About 27% of the teachers assigned 60% to % 80 of grade for improvement of physical fitness. About 37% of the teachers agreed upon using integrated physical education method for their teaching. According to the findings of the study, it was concluded that the quantitative and qualitative conditions for PE working at the elementary schools are not in a desirable condition, so this convey a warning signal for those in charge of education and training system of the country as well as the students' parents.

**Key words:** Physical education, sport facilities and equipment, elementary school.

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### **Introduction**

Physical education plays a critical role in educating the *whole* student. Research supports the importance of movement in educating both mind and body. A well-planned physical education program can lead to the development of physical competence and fitness in all grade levels. The benefits of physical education can affect both academic learning and physical activity patterns of students. The healthy, physically active student is more likely to be academically motivated, alert, and successful. Throughout the school years, quality physical education program can promote social, cooperative and problem solving competencies. Physical education has unique place at the school curriculum. It is the only program that provides students with opportunities to learn motor skills, develop fitness, and gain understanding about physical activity. Physical benefits gained from physical activity include disease prevention, safety and injury

avoidance, decreased morbidity and premature mortality, and improvement of mental health (12).

In addition, the correct implementation of PE programs at schools is an effective mean to find talents for championship sport, education and development of general sports and changing attitude toward having an active life-style. For these reasons, the curriculum related to the PE must have the special place in the educational program of schools. In year 1927, the formal PE program officially started at this country and ever since it has witnessed noticeable challenges. The course presented in the education system addresses different educational levels. It was based on the government approval from the beginning. However, implementation and making suitable programs for some grades faced some difficulties. In particular, in 1985 based on the approval console of education system, specialist teacher of PE course in elementary schools were eliminated and teaching PE courses was left to non specialist teachers (*resolution No 4628, dated 25 august 1985*). In 1988, a new prospect toward the PE program was developed in the ministry of education. New actions for the provision of PE program with new insight also started. At the same time, attempts were made to prepare new resources for teaching, particularly, for the first three levels of elementary schools were addressed then to use the program from the education year 2005-2006. The higher levels were also included to use these education programs and resources.

It seemed that a new development concerning the value and implication of PE course was emerged by students' parents as well as their teachers. From 1975, there have been many researches who tried to evaluate these programs. In these researches, factors such as educational documents of teachers, teaching experience, thought concentration and concerns of parents and teachers on PE course, education levels of principal and their knowledge about PE, sport facilities and places (equipments), scientific fields and number of teaching hours were examined(11, 5,9,15).

The results of some of researches in regard to the condition of the educational level of PE teachers and principal of elementary school in IRAN showed that their educational levels were mostly at the diploma or two year post diploma degree (8,9,15).

The level of knowledge and proficiency as well as physical ability and sport dominance are considered as important factors for successful teaching (2,3,14). The majority of researches reported in this regard have claimed that these requirements have been within the moderate level, however, report by Kashef, (1993) and Naul, (2002) claimed that they were at the ideal level. Teaching experience of teachers and principal is one of the success factors in their assumed obligations, but research findings (5,15) has shown that they did not benefit from these aspect at a high level.

One of the important factors for the successful planning and implementing PE program at schools is the care and attention of the parents and principals. MirzaRezaei, (2002) reported that this factor was at the ideal level, but the results reported by Kashef, (1993), Adineh, (2000) and Hemmati, (2002) did not confirm those findings. Also the results from the previous studies (5,7-10,13) did not rate the care and concern of principal for PE in an ideal level.

Unfortunately, there were some basic shortcomings and necessary challenges for the PE course from the beginning to the present day reported by some researchers. Several researchers reported the lack of knowledge of teachers and principal in regard to PE (5,9,15), lack of sport facilities and equipment (5,15,16), no specialist PE teachers (5,8,15), and insufficient time of PE teaching and training at schools (5,2,13). However, Naul (2002) in his study did not confirm such findings.

The majority of aforementioned researches conducted were limited to a province, city or town. Study of appropriate methods for implementing the course at national levels was necessary. Therefore, the researchers thought that for conducting a research as such so that its results can lead to an ideal condition.

## Methods

This was a descriptive research. The data were collected by the field method. The statistical population included the principals and teachers of the first three grades of the elementary schools. A total of 11808 boy and 11937 girl elementary schools of 28 provinces in the country were included in this study. In addition, these statistics were collected from the information center and statistics of education system during the education year of 2005-2006.

The sample for this study included 10 % of statistical population. For the selection purpose nationwide, the provinces were clustered into five regions of Central, East, West, North and South. Then, 15 provinces were randomly selected from these regions. At the next stage, an equal number ( $n=40$ ) of male and female teachers and principal, respectively, were selected from each region. Finally, 1129 PE teachers (male= 796 and female =325) were randomly selected for the study.

In this research, two questionnaires were used. The questions used "Linkert" five scales rating (very much, much, average, little, very little) and two-choice question options of "Yes" or "No" response. The questions included a series of responses concerning the goal of the course, course content, work force, evaluation, facilities and equipments, and the strength and weakness of presenting PE course at the first three grades of elementary schools. The content validity of the questionnaires was checked by reviewing them by 15 university professors and PhD students of sport management. The internal consistency of the questions was determined by using Cronbach alpha. Following the completion of the research project, data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics including frequency, mean and standard division of the means.

## Results and Discussion

Physical education offers a unique opportunity within the school curriculum. It is the only program that provides students with opportunities for learning motor skills, develop fitness, and gain understanding about physical activity. Physical benefits gained through the physical activity include disease prevention, safety and injury avoidance, decreased morbidity and premature mortality, and increased mental health. In the elementary grades, the physical education program emphasizes the development of fundamental locomotors, non-locomotors, and manipulative skills through the main content areas of educational games, dance, and gymnastics. The movement framework, (i.e., body, space, effort, and relationship) is also part of the course content and is the basis for developing, expanding, and refining children's range of motor skills and awareness.

The physical education program is the context where students learn about all of the benefits gained from being physically active as well as the skills and knowledge to incorporate safe, satisfying physical activity into their lives.

Quality instruction by physical education professionals is critical if children are to develop fundamental motor patterns (e.g. jump, throw, skip, hop, catch, and kick). The motor skill foundations established during the elementary grades may enhance children's social, cognitive and physical development and increase the likelihood of continued interest and participation in physical activity (12).

While about 75% of the teachers who are teaching PE have no expertise and the majority of teachers, 80% have only diploma or two years of college degrees, it would be unrealistic to expect PE curriculum to be beneficial for all students. These findings confirm those reported in the previous researches (5,8,9, and 15).

**Table 1.** Analysis of data obtained by responses to questionnaire.

No	Question	Response (percent)	No	Question	Response (percent)
1	PE teachers' academic documentary	%80 diploma or two years college degree	17	Teaching space for PE	%78 school's yard-% outdoor place- %3.5 private salon- %3.7 non-private salon
2	The effectiveness of make-up classes for PE teachers'	<b>Very much</b> (%50)	18	Instructional time allocated to PE course	<b>Little</b> (%67 of PE teacher's and managers)
3	Teaching by non-specialist teachers	%75 of male and %90 of female teacher's	19	Application of instructional material to student's ability	<b>Much</b> (%32 of teacher's)
4	Teaching experience	PE teachers (1-3 years), managers (1-5 y)	20	Student's interest and motivation in PE class	<b>Very much</b> (%67 of managers)
5	Teaching other lesson by PE teacher's	%64 of male and %74 of female teacher's	21	Effective of PE to create awareness of students' in terms of health care	<b>Very much</b> (%32 of male and female teacher's)
6	Scientific knowledge relating to PE course	<b>Average</b> (%43 of male and %54 of female teacher's)	22	To pay attention to the accomplishment of fundamental skills	<b>much</b> (%41 of male and female teachers')
7	Teachers physical ability for teaching PE	<b>Average</b> (%42 of male and %48 of female teacher's)	23	Important of main exercise (exercise in the morning) in schools from viewpoint of managers	<b>Very much</b> (%38 of male and %45 of female managers')
8	Dominating of PE teacher's over their field of teaching	<b>Average</b> (%38 of male and %43 of female teacher's)	24	Allocated budget (finance) to PE course in elementary school	<b>Average</b> (% 45 of managers)
9	To reach fulfillment the objective PE course	<b>Average</b> (%46 of male teacher's) and <b>Very much</b> (%44 of female teacher's)	25	The rate of managers satisfaction of planning and organizing of PE course	<b>Much</b> (%32 of managers)
10	PE teacher's studies time relating PE lesson	1-2 hour in a term (%36 of male and %41 of female teacher's)	26	The status of school yard cover for teaching PE from viewpoint of managers	%32 of manager reported as 'Fair'
11	The rate of PE teacher's satisfaction of PE course execution	<b>Average</b> (%46 of male and %43 of female teacher's)	27	Grading procedure	%91 of PE teacher's gives grade to improving physical fitness and skill learning
12	The rate of managers satisfaction of PE course execution	<b>Much</b> (%30 of male and %34 of female manager's)	28	Allocating PE instructional time to other I courses	Very little (%32 of teachers)
13	The notice of parents related to PE from PE teachers viewpoint	Little (%33 of male and %34 of female teacher's)	29	managers satisfaction of PE execution	%66 of managers had not satisfaction
14	The notice of parents related to PE from managers viewpoint	<b>Average</b> (%33 of male and %35 of female manager's)	30	Hindrance factors in executing of PE class from PE teachers' and managers viewpoint	1-the nonexistence of specialist PE teacher's 2-shortage of educational place, 3-shortage of sport equipment
15	The notice of ministry of education responsible related to PE from PE teachers viewpoint	<b>Average</b> (%37 of male and %34 of female teacher's)	31	Using of annual and daily lesson plan for teaching by PE teachers'	%85 of PE teachers' used them
16	The notice of ministry of education responsible related to PE from manager's viewpoint	<b>Average</b> (%33 of male and %35 of female manager's)	32	The effect of PE activity on creating spiritual inspiration and group cooperation	<b>Very much</b> (%70 of male and female teachers')

In the most development countries, teachers with high experience and academic degrees receive social, financial, and welfare privileges. Experience has shown that the more is capitalized at this level of education for the growth of students, the healthier, better conduct and more efficient social behavior is observed in students. Such programs will foster creativity, productivity and better life condition for the future generation.

On the other hand, technology and knowledge develops so quickly that a teacher has no alternative, but to keep on with the pace and obtain the ability and specialty to teach. Whiles in the present research, it is estimated that about 70% of the teachers are obliged to teach other subjects in schools, above 27% of males and 6% of females hold another job to make a living. Therefore, facing teachers with living condition, where they have to get involved in unrelated jobs in addition to lack of social welfare and financial support, it will have negative effect on their productivity and efficiency within the education system in schools.

Regarding the fact that experience and length of teaching of PE teachers' and principal can be one of the key factors of success. in the present research 23% of teachers had 1-3 years experience, 26 % of male principal and 30% of female principal had 5-10 years and 1-5 years of experience, respectively. Sajadi (1990) and Rezai (1993) concluded that low literacy coincides with low experience and lack of specialty in PE adding to the deficiencies existing within the education system.

One of the other factors affecting planning and presenting PE in schools is the cooperation of parents and instructors. In the present research, about 35% of teachers claimed that parent's involvement was low. Thirty three percent of principals rated it at the intermediate level. These results are in agreement with previous studies (8, 9, 10), but do not confirm the results reported by Cflri's (1995). This author stated that the vast majority of parents appreciated the benefits of encouraging physical activity for children and youth. A parent survey (n=600) found that over 70% of parents strongly agreed with the idea that physical activity helps the child's growth and development, build self-esteem and leads to a positive self-image, helps build concentration and improves learning, and helps children learn to share and cooperate with others.

A person who seeks a job should have general and special qualification if s/he is to be successful. Being a teacher is a sensitive, complicated and hard work, particularly being a physical education teacher. Research has shown that a majority of teachers (about % 50) have rated their scientific knowledge, physical abilities, mastery over filed of sports, ability to achieve PE goals and the amount of satisfaction with their performance of PE at an intermediate (medium) level. These results are similar to what was reported by Alam's (2003), but disagree with those reported by others (3,4,9).

It is recommended that 10% of instructional time should be spent on physical education (6). The minimum instructional time for elementary students is 36 hours per week. Therefore, the recommended amount of elementary instructional time devoted to physical education should be 3.6 hours a week (216 minutes).

The present findings indicated that the time allocated to PE program is less than 120 minute per week. About 61% of the PE teachers and principal have stated that this time is not sufficient and believe that it should be two sessions per week (about 240 minute).

Every teacher set the goals and objective in three categories and thrives to fulfill those objectives to the best his or her ability. Physical education teachers have rated the results of their objectives in emotional-social perspectives as " good", that is, above 70% referred to the effect of physical activities on creating spiritual inspiration and group cooperation.

Relating to cognitive domain which means awareness of students in terms of health care, only about one third of teachers have described this cognition and health habits, in terms of psycho-movement which encompasses physical strength, % 50 of teachers

considered it as 'complete'. Therefore, it is clear that teachers consider this objective in syllabus design. But to what extent these aims have been distributed in lesson content property and teachers would consider it or not need awareness and through cognition of philosophy and their results, investigation these procedures we should consider hindrance factors in physical education performances. But according to the findings, teachers still aren't aware of arrangement of PE objectives, and various findings of this research gives the right to the teachers, we can't expect more since they had low experience and no credited degrees along with no sufficient education.

Unfortunately, after 32 years of the first research,(11) it is evident that, these obstacles including principle shortage in terms of planning, specialist physical teachers, low literacy rate of teachers, proper educational space, educational equipments, instructional time for PE, parents ignorance's, and lack of care by those who are responsible for PE are still prevalent in schools. Perhaps the more time passes; the more extensive the negative effects will be evident. Meanwhile, students are the real losers. They are not taken into account in terms of their physical and mental health. These findings should be alarming for those who are responsible in department of education. In addition, it should send a clear message to the parents about the condition of their children's physical and mental health and development.

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